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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Nominations for the U.S. Tax Court and Deputy U.S. Trade Representative
As Prepared for Delivery

The Finance Committee meets today to discuss two nominations to the U.S. Tax Court and one for a position as Deputy U.S. Trade Representative. The Tax Court is all about fairness for the taxpayer – giving them a venue to dispute potentially mistaken charges before having to pay. And USTR is facing big challenges, because the phase-one China trade deal that the president called the biggest deal anywhere in the world is already failing. The new NAFTA is in danger of becoming only so many words on paper if this administration does not step up on implementation of the labor obligations and other commitments. In the fight against trade cheats, American workers and businesses need USTR to do better. So these are both important roles, and the nominees before the committee today are qualified to fill them.

With that said, this is the committee’s first meeting after a recess that the Senate should not have taken. In this pandemic, virtually every new day is the worst day yet. And tens of millions of jobless Americans are headed over an income cliff if the Senate does not act in the coming days. So while the nominations before this committee are important and I’m looking forward to the discussion with our witnesses, the committee also needs to move quickly past business as usual.

There are COVID hot spots all over the country. Just like in March and April, the testing cannot keep up with the spread of the virus. Health care workers don’t have adequate PPE. You can count on one hand the states that have the pandemic under control.

Parents are afraid to send their kids back to school, and too many school districts don’t know when or how they’ll be able to bring kids back safely. It’s a disaster for teachers and staff, for kids and for parents, many of whom might have to drop out of the workforce to provide their own childcare.

Any hope for a quick economic rebound is disappearing. Consumer spending is dropping. Short-term furloughs are turning into permanent layoffs. The number of new weekly unemployment claims, which before this year had never crossed 700,000, has been a million or more for 17 weeks straight.

Everyone understands that this country is at the beginning of a once-in-a-century unemployment crisis. But if not for supercharged unemployment benefits keeping families afloat, this country would also be in the middle of a second Great Depression. Those benefits, however, will expire in a matter of days. They will lapse if Senate Republicans refuse to act by July 25th. That will be a moral and economic disaster that would hit this country like a wrecking ball.

Colleagues, the Trump administration doesn't have a real plan for any of it. The administration is hiding COVID data from the public. Going by media reports, their big economic idea is to cut jobless workers' incomes and give others a fake tax cut they'll have to repay after the election.

Renewing supercharged unemployment benefits at \$600 per week cannot wait any longer. Leader Schumer and I have a proposal called the American Workforce Rescue Act that would tether those benefits to the economic conditions on the ground, instead of going by arbitrary extensions. The Senate should have passed it two weeks ago, instead of leaving town for recess.

By delaying on unemployment benefits, the Republican leader is exploiting for political leverage all those Americans who are walking an economic tightrope. It is wrong, and it ought to end this week.

So today's hearing will examine some important nominations. I appreciate why Chairman Grassley called this hearing. I look forward to Q&A. And in the days ahead, I hope that this committee turns again to address the economic cliff and the pandemic that has killed 140,000 Americans and is threatening to do extraordinary, long-lasting damage to our economy.

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